
Murder As A Form Of Justice In Medea And Trifles

Justice or fairness depends on the situation and also the person who viewed it. Just like how beauty is in the eyes of the beholder, the history books can be biased based on the perspective of the writers. It is hard to justify if specific situations if a person is wrong or right. Hence, human civilization has made laws to set a bar of a good morality and a defined line between right and wrong. Courts, laws, civil rights and human rights are some examples of the existence of social justice in modern community. I was not surprised that these kind of laws or rights have existed for centuries. For example, sharia law which exists in the Quran. (explain more - summary and one of the law). Medea, an ancient Greek mythology, was written in 431 BC by Euripides whereas Trifles was first performed in 1916 and written by Susan Glaspell. Both stories deeply uncover the social expectation towards gender role and the oppression on women in a patriarchal society. They were uniquely told in the way of the authors chose the form, the usage of symbolism, irony, themes, and the characters in building the tension and delivering the message.

Medea and Trifles were both written in form of drama. What makes drama different from other genres of literature is the nonexistence of narrator in the literary work. Thus, drama will leave more surprise and judgment of the characters to the audience. It is interesting that in Medea, the Chorus was used to aid the audience in understanding what was going on in the play due to the limitations in production at that time. In another word or interpretation, Chorus are another version of narrator. In fact, chorus keep on asking question to the characters in order to get into their mind and thoughts. On the contrary, Trifles did not have any chorus. The readers get to know the characters' thoughts through their conversation with each other. However, Trifles gave more details on how the actors or actresses would act on stage. These details will give clear body languages which are as important as verbal communication. For instance, the moment when Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters were thinking of the evidence that can relate to Mrs. Wright's motive of killing her husband, the situation was explained as "she puts her hand on the dish towel which lies on the table, stands looking down at table, one half of which is clean and the other half messy."(Glaspell, 226). Personally, I feel more connected to the characters in Trifles as I can picture the situation more vividly including the emotional tension among the characters.

Another important thing to note is the era which these stories were written. This is a big influence on the writers as they wrote the stories based on the technology available to them at that time which subsequently can affect their choice of writing in a certain form. In Medea, chorus are important characters as they need to inform the audience the current situation on stage as we know that during the ancient time, the drama was acted in a large open space and there was no such thing as hand free microphones and speakers. For example, chorus were saying "I heard her voice, I heard that unhappy woman from Colchia still crying, not calm yet." (Euripides, 200). Despite of giving a clarity, this will lead to a lot of repetition and might bore the audience. In a modern world, chorus are not needed as people can hear the actors and actresses clearly. Hence, it does not interrupt their understanding or ability to follow the stories. This is the reason why trifle was written by focusing more on the verbal and non-verbal communication among the characters. However, is the non-verbal communication really important? This is because, the audience may have sight limitation to see small movements of

the characters. For example, "Their eyes meet. A look of growing comprehension, of horror." (Glaspell, 227)

Next, symbolism is one of the interesting ways the author made in building up the tension in the story. Symbolism serves as a great punch line if the audience can grasp the idea. In *Medea* there is no significance symbolism whereas *Trifles* does have a few significance symbolisms that portrayed the themes and plot of the stories. The major symbols in *Trifles* were a jar of fruit, dirty towel, a loaf of uncooked bread, quilt and the dead bird. "Well, women are used to worry over trifles." (Glaspell, 225) was said by Hale when Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters mentioned about the jar of fruits. Men also showed their superiority by judging Mrs. Wright for not being a good housekeeper as she kept dirty towel and a loaf of uncooked bread in the kitchen and mocking the way both of their wives were bothering about the quilt. These situations heavily demonstrated the oppression towards women and the expectation of gender role by stereotyping women to perform all the domestic duties. The jar of fruit and the bread meant more to Mrs. Wright as that was the only thing she was allowed to do for her happiness in the house. According to psychologist, cooking or baking are therapeutic as it can make a person feel happier and more excited for the next day. It is currently being explored to help people with depression and anxiety. (Lewis). By relating this new study to Mrs. Wright scenario, it can be concluded that Mrs. Wright has no longer expect a tomorrow and none of the cooking or baking are therapeutic anymore in helping her dealing with mental illness after being psychologically abused by her husband.

Meanwhile, the dirty towel showed that how men were not paying any attention to the amount of house chores that women need to fulfil in her daily life. This subsequently affect the women social life as how Mrs. Hales mentioned "I liked her all well enough. Farmers' wives have their hands full, Mr. Henderson." (Glaspell, 225) when she was asked about her current relationship with Mrs. Wright as a neighbor. With no social interaction, the wives would be more dependent on the husband and for Mrs. Wright, it will make her condition worse as there was no one that she can turn to. The most important symbol in *Trifles* was the quilt as its symbolized Mrs. Wright as the one who was responsible for her husband death. It also symbolized how women intelligence are belittled and not appreciated. It also indicates men's pride and prejudiced towards women as they do not even respect others opinion rather than from their own gender. Women were not given any chance to speak up and that was how they should behave in society. Hence, the outcome of this case was in favor of one side as men held more power in determining Mrs. Wright's innocence or fate. Ironically, it was the men who looked stupid because they were the one who were fooled by the women. This was proven at the end of the story when the county attorney asked Mrs. Hale about her findings at the house particularly about the quilt and she answer it with "We call it-knot it, Mr. Henderson" which denoted as the most powerful rebellious act in breaking the social norm and the law.

The dead bird in the story symbolized the oppression on women. It portrayed how powerful men in controlling women's life by confining them into a house and restricting their social interaction or hobby, notably when Mrs. Hale mentioned that Mr. Wright was a hard man and Mrs. Wright used to sing and she was a cheerful person but, not anymore. Mrs. Hale highlighted the situation to Mrs. Peters that what they did was a crime too as they did not visit Mrs. Wright despite of knowing how hard her life was which the same things that they were experiencing as she said, "it's all just a different kind of the same thing."(Glaspell, 228). Mrs. Peters illustrated her empathy by saying "(in a whisper) When I was a girl—my kitten—there was a boy took a hatchet, and before my eyes—and before I could get there—(covers her face an instant)If they

hadn't held me back I would have—(catches herself, looks upstairs where steps are heard, falters weakly)—hurt him.”(Glaspell, 228). She completely understands why Mrs. Wright killed her husband because she almost did the same thing to a boy who killed her kitten too. This story created an awareness regarding domestic violence which can happen to anyone regardless of gender. Take an example of Johnny Depp who claimed that he was abused by his ex-wife, Amber Heard. It is important for people to stand up for themselves and seek the authority for justice.

Medea did not have any significance symbolisms, but it did share the same thematic with Trifles which act as the central idea that the author used in building up the tension in the story. That is people are not appreciating women especially their intelligence and expecting them to become submissive towards men. This can be proven when King of Corinth said “I fear that you may do to my daughter some irreparable harm. A number of things contribute to my anxiety. You're a clever woman, skilled in many evil arts; You're barred from Jason's bed, and that enrages you. Of revenge on Jason and his bride and his bride's father. I'll act first, then, in self-defend. I'd rather make you my enemy now, then weaken, and later pay with tears.” (Euripides, 202). She was brilliant and that made men around him felt unease with her ability to turn the situation to another way around. Ironically, it was Creon who was crying over his daughter dead body not Medea. The other way to look at this situation was women were portrayed as an emotional, wilds, and reckless person which associated with feminine traits. However, I was interested with the idea from Carolyn A. Durham as she managed to look this situation differently. She mentioned how Medea appeared to be more masculine while Jason is more feminine. This is because, Medea was the who a person that fulfilled her words by actions even she was pathetic and hopeless. Throughout the story it was Medea who taking charge in getting the golden fleece and tricked Pelias's daughter for Jason. This showed a reversal of sex role.

Moreover, in my personal view, Jason has taken an advantage of her cleverness in order to get the golden fleece and status from Pelias. He was someone who only care about his status or society impression towards him and he was the most manipulative person who good at playing victim until we felt sympathy towards him even what he did to Medea was as evil as killing his family. This is because, he betrayed Medea by agreeing to marry Creon's daughter for status. What kind of husband or father that abandoned his wife and sons for another woman and let them live in exile? He started to care about his sons and asked Glauce to accept them only after Medea pleaded him to save them. Most importantly, the only part of this story that he showed his love towards his son was right after Glauce and Creon were dead by Medea mischievous plan. I believe he was acting this way to preserve his good image so that he appeared innocent. However, whenever his image was tainted, he would blame Medea. He did not love Medea or his children. If he loved them dearly, he would save his marriage and choose to be a good husband. Instead, he justified that he wanted to marry Glauce for the benefits of Medea and his sons. His ignorance to accept his own mistakes and infidelity backfired him as he lost all that he had which Medea has helped him to achieve without he even noticed. This was the effect when he tried to outsmart Medea. He was back to be a Jason who has nothing to be proud of. He lost the title as a husband and a father. The same goes to Medea. She also the same person before she met Jason. She lost her title as a wife and a mother.

Comparing both women characters in the stories, I adore Medea the most. This is because, she is intelligent, independent, heartless, has a long-term vision and decisive in achieving her objectives. I inspired to be a person like her. She is like another version of Voldemort in Harry Potter movie. Most importantly, she is very loyal to her beloved husband, Jason. This is proven

when the Nurse said 'Then neither would Medea, my mistress, ever have set sail for the walled town of Iolcus, mad with love for Jason: nor would she, when Pelias' daughters, at her instance, killed their father, have come with Jason and her children to live here in Corinth'.(Euripides, 198) I respect her bravery in leaving her family, friends and country behind for Jason. However, I disagree with her decision of cutting ties with her family by killing his own brother and made enemies with Pelias' daughters just for helping Jason getting a golden fleece and a status. This is relatable to the modern world where women were blinded by love and follow a man who has nothing to offer except love. In my country, this once has been a hot issue and highly disputable. It also appeared in news where Malaysian women who willingly followed a foreigner, begged Malaysian government to bring them back to their family as they were suffering living in poverty and in unsanitary place. At the end of the day, it always the women whom will suffer just like Medea after being abandoned by Jason for a royalty. It is sad that these women have nowhere to return and no one to get comfort because of their mistake cutting ties with their friends and family.

The question that I have in mind is whether both of the women's actions were a form of justice. Did their husbands deserve the punishment? Personally, I agree with the actions taken in both stories as it gives a sense of satisfaction towards me as a reader. Women were oppressed and have no voice in a men dominance society which led them to justify the situation with their own judgement. However, should the ends justify the means? To contemplate this again by considering moral values instead of having any feeling of empathy or sympathy, what Medea, Mrs. Wright, Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale did were totally wrong. Furthermore, Medea's sons were innocent. They could stay alive and have a full life ahead of them if they did not get caught in their parents' vengeance. I believe that those who fight for justice would not get any harm in return and vice versa for revenge. Medea became an exile and suffered due to her lost as she has killed her sons while Mrs. Wright suffered by living in prison after being a suspect of killing her husband. This situation makes me believe that two wrongs do not make a right.

References

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